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RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0030  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0600  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000298

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, DRL/NESCA  
LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR WALLER

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH AND GERMAN EMBASSIES PREPARED TO REQUEST  
SARG FREE AILING RIAD SEIF

REF: A. 08 DAMASCUS 00757  
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 00272

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Jumana Seif (strictly protect), the daughter of prominent Damascus Declaration leader Riad Seif (ref A) who is serving a two and a half year prison sentence, met with PolEconoffs on April 22 to discuss her father's increasingly precarious health situation. She reported that the French and German Embassies were willing to press the SARG through diplomatic channels for Riad's Seif's release on humanitarian grounds, but were waiting for a decision from her on whether to proceed. She requested similar support from the U.S., either in conjunction with, or separate from, the French and Germans. END SUMMARY.

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Seif's Declining Health  
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[1](#)2. (C) Riad Seif's most recent blood work, according to Jumana, indicated an increased presence of cancer. A February biopsy on Riad's prostate had shown no sign of cancer, initially pointing to the success of his May 2008 surgery. In light of the recent test results, however, the family and Riad's doctor fear his cancer began to metastasize prior to the original surgery to remove it.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Jumana, Riad had recently been suffering intense pain in his back. This information corroborates what we learned in an April 21 meeting with civil society activist Daad Mousa, who told us Riad's prison-mate and Damascus Declaration colleague, Anwar al-Bunni, had called her from prison to register his concern over Riad's pain and his inability to get out of bed. These reports further support the claims of Riad al-Turk, who expressed similar anxieties about Riad's health during a meeting with PolEconoffs in early April (ref B).

[1](#)4. (C) For his part, Riad reported he was feeling better and that his intense back pain had somewhat subsided, Jumana said. He has not been told, however, the results of the recent blood work, she added. She explained Riad's private physician, who has repeatedly made the results of the testing known only to the prison doctors, recommended a battery of tests for Seif to follow up on the initial blood screen.

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French and German Support  
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15. (C) Jumana informed us the French and German Embassies told her they were prepared to demarche the SARG in an effort to obtain Riad's release on humanitarian grounds; the idea being he needs intensive treatment, perhaps outside of Syria.

The German Ambassador told her he had made the request in a recent meeting with Foreign Minister Walid Muallim, and Muallim gruffly replied, tell him to ask to be released and then "you can take him." (Comment: Jumana said she was unsure whether Muallim was serious or simply making an offhand remark. End Comment) Both the French and German Embassies have expressed concern that Riad might reject a SARG offer to release him if other Damascus Declaration National Council Members remain in detention, as he reportedly has done in the past. Jumana explained that SARG authorities, like Riad, did not know about the results of the most recent blood work, and Riad has not made a formal request to prison/government authorities for medical treatment. In fact, Jumana said, Riad recently refused a trip to the doctor for reasons nobody quite understood. She said he might fear more bad news about his health and preferred not to know.

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Request for U.S. Support  
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16. (C) Jumana asked whether we would support the French and the Germans, perhaps going so far as to jointly demarche the SARG. We advised her that the SARG would probably be more

responsive to the French and Germans at this stage. We could assess what value we could bring to the process, should they fail. We cautioned her, though, that a demarche to the SARG without its prior knowledge of the blood work results would probably prove ineffective. Moreover, if Riad were not a willing participant and would not ask for treatment in advance of diplomatic action, a demarche from anyone on the subject could be counterproductive.

17. (C) At the meeting's conclusion, Jumana said she would attempt to persuade Riad to sign a letter requesting his release for treatment outside of prison. If diplomatic efforts failed, she said, she would come to us and, very probably, go to the media. In the past, she told us, the SARG had warned her that contacting the media would make matters worse for Riad. Given the state of his health and the conditions he lives in, she said, she is now willing to try anything.

18. (C) COMMENT: As reported Ref B, during Senator John Kerry's February visit to Damascus, he raised Riad Seif's case with President al-Asad over a private dinner. Senator Kerry told us that Asad said he could consider releasing Seif if he (Seif) would write a letter to the proper authorities confessing to the charges against him and asking for mercy. Given what we know of Seif's character from his family and colleagues, it strikes us as improbable he would undertake a letter of this sort. Post will continue to monitor the news on Seif's health and will confirm with our French and German diplomatic colleagues the extent to which they are prepared to press the SARG on this issue. END COMMENT.  
CONNELLY